

## Chapter 04. The notion of Pudgala of the Vātsīputrīya

Although the dharma theory is an innovation of the Abhidharmika-s, the antecedent trends that led to its formation can be traced to the early Buddhist scriptures which seek to analyze empiric individuality and its relation to the external world. In the discourses of the Buddha there are five modes of analysis –

1. The first analysis is that of nāma and rūpa which is the mental and corporeal - aspects of the empiric individual.
2. The second is the five aggregates (pañca - skandhas) into form (rūpa), sensation (vedanā), perception (saṃjñā), mental formations (saṃskāra), and consciousness (vijñāṇa).
3. The third is that of the six elements (dhātus): earth element (pruṭhavī-dhātu), water element (āpa-dhātu), temperature element (teja-dhātu), air element (vāyu-dhātu), space element (Ākāśa-dhātu), and consciousness element (vijñāṇa-dhātu).
4. The fourth is that into the twelve āyatana of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; and their corresponding objects: visible form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects.
5. The fifth is that into eighteen dhātus (elements), an elaboration of the immediately preceding mode obtained by the addition of the six kinds of consciousness which arise from the contact between the sense organs and their objects. The six additional items are the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousness.

The main purpose in Buddhism for the skandhas analysis is to show that there is no ego either inside or outside the five skandhas which made up of the individual self. And the analysis of the individual into eighteen dhātus is often resorted to show that consciousness is neither a soul but mental phenomena which come into being as a result of certain conditions: there is no independent consciousness which exists in its own right. Each of these five kinds of analysis is used to explain certain features of sentient existence and none of them can be taken as final or absolute.

In the Abhidharma, dharma means the element which is synthesized and analyzed. So these dharmas can be physical or mental, rūpa-dharma and nāma-dharma. Nāma-dhamma refers to mental or psychological factors while rūpa-dhamma means physical or material factors. Both of these two in combination compose of the world of experience. Everything can be ultimately reduced to dharmas whether animate or inanimate. Beside dharmas nothing else exists. Dharma can be interpreted into phenomena; behind phenomena there are no noumena. There is no ultimate reality which serves the background of dharma as dharmas are the real nature of living existence.

Dharmas do not emanate [flow from] another reality. They are ultimate, but they are not eternal as they are anicca, dukkha and anatta, without any substance.

Dharmas are factors which are obtain by analyzing further the five aggregates. Dharma is a new conception from analysis. So this is the continuation of the

Abhidharma-s to systematize and bring out the nature of the dharmas which in their views constitute reality.

The Pudgalavāda was a group of five early schools of Buddhism with their distinctive doctrine concerning the reality of the self or person. The group consists of the Vātsīputrīya, the origins of the Pudgalavādin school, and four others that derived from it, the Dharmottarīya, the Bhadrāyāniya, the Saṃmitīya and the Shānnagarika. The Dharmottarīya, Bhadrāyāniya and Shānnagarika are branches of the Pudgalavāda but there is not much account of their doctrines or where they flourished. Of these schools, only the Vātsīputrīya and the Saṃmitīya has large numbers of followers. In the history of Buddhism, it was the Vātsīputrīya and its branch the Saṃmitīya who dared persistently propose and defend the pudgala theory. The theory was refuted especially in the Kathāvatthu controversies.

According to the dharma theory, how do we explain the “person” or the “puggala”? A person is a series of dharma, a series of mental and physical dharmas that always change. Each person can be reduced to a series of momentary dharmas.

A question was asked by a monk who was against this doctrine: ‘How do we explain memory, rebirth, continuity of process, karma, and who attains nibbana? Who goes from birth to birth? They say besides dharmas, we have an admitted person described as Pudgalavāda. Pudgalavāda is the first controversy that arose against the dharmavāda. That led to a further clarification of the nature of dharma-s.

The purpose of the pudgala doctrines was formulated to explain saṃsāric process and the agent of karma and memory. If there is no pudgala, who is said to transmigrate in saṃsāra? If there is no pudgala, given the fact that citta ceases in a moment, how can one remembers a similar object that has been experienced long ago? If there is no pudgala, how can karma which has perished give rise to a future fruit? And the answer is the –pudgala. It is the pudgala that transmigrate in saṃsāra that remembers, that experience the result of karma. The Vātsīputrīya and Saṃmitīya inherited this doctrine.

What does early Buddhism think about the concept of pudgala? The empiric individual, pudgala can be reduced to the five khandhas. Where is the pudgala? The five skandhas are not related to pudgala. If pudgala is related to five khandhas, then pudgala can be the ātman but it is not interpreted in that sense. These five khandhas are inter-related, causally connected, but not related to pudgala or ātman. They are related on the basis of Dependent Arising. The five skandhas arise depending on Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda).

A person is made up of the five aggregates, which are interrelated and constantly change. We can distinguish one aggregate from the other, but we cannot separate one from another because they are interrelated.

In the Abhidharma, the five aggregates are reduced into a number of dharma-s that is supposed to exist for one moment, so dhammas are momentary. Then a problem arises: if a person can be reduced into a series of dhammas, how can we explain the “continuity”, “saṃsāra”, “memory” and “moral responsibility”. The person who came up with this movement was Vātsīputta, who was a monk. Vātsīputta’s contention is that beside the five aggregates there is a pudgala. However the way of defining the concept of pudgala did not satisfy some Buddhists. In their opinions, the dharma theory as represented by the Theravādins led to a complete depersonalization of the

individual beings and consequently failed to provide adequate explanations to concepts of continuity of rebirth, memory and a person's moral responsibility.

This controversy between Vātsīputrīya and the authority of Theravāda is recorded in the Kathāvatthu, which was compiled during the Third Buddhist Council. As recorded in the Kathāvatthu, the Points of Controversies, the main contention is that the pudgala is known in the real and ultimate sense ("Saccikaṭṭha paramatṭheva pudgala ūpalabbhati" as admitted by the Theravadins. Thus what is real and ultimate is not the person but the skandhas or dharma-s that enters into its composition.

In Pudgalavāda, they also accept dharma; but they say, beside dharma there is pudgala. The Vātsīputrīya classify all dharma-s into five categories, the fifth of which is the ineffable pudgala. They establish a collection of fivefold dharma-s; those pertaining to the three periods of time, past, present and future, the unconditioned dharma and the ineffable. They hold that this pudgala is neither permanent nor impermanent, and cannot be said to be conditioned or unconditioned. The true pudgala cannot be described (*avāca*) in its regards to the five aggregates, since it cannot be identified with the aggregates and cannot be found apart from them, the aggregates are neither the same nor different. It is this self, they maintained that dies and is reborn through successive lives in Saṃsāra and continues to exist until enlightenment is attained. This is the same person who wanders from one existence to another, who sought for salvation and won. For more than ten centuries, the Pudgalavāda was taught and defended by several schools and followers, at the same time it was strongly criticized by other Buddhist schools. The creation of this theory represents a reaction to the Abhidharma masters who felt that it was heretical.

### **Sarvāstivāda refutation of the Pudgalavāda in the Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya, Vasubandhu examines the pudgala thesis with a number of questions. The Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya debates starts with the dilemma as to whether the Vātsīputrīya are Buddhists at all and entitle to attain emancipation or not? Vasubandhu asked the crucial question on whether the pudgala is real (*dravya*) or only conventional (*prajñapti*). The real existence in the Abhidharmika context denotes the existence of elements like rūpa as such whereas the conventional stands for an element like milk which is a mere name having no separate existence of its own apart from the constituents. So, if the Pudgala is real, then it would be different from the skandhas as *vedanā* is from rūpa. In that case it should be constituted (*saṃskṛtā*) or unconstituted (*asaṃskṛtā*). But it cannot be the latter as it would imply *sasvata* view. On the other hand if the Pudgala is said to be conventional, its existence should depend on the skandhas and since it has no independent existence of its own, it cannot be said to exist.

The Vātsīputrīya answered that the Pudgala is real but it is neither identical with nor different from the skandhas. Just like fire is to the fuel. Fire exists as long as there is fuel so the pudgala exist as long as there is skandhas.

Vasubandhu argues that fuel and fire appear at different times just like the seed and the sprout. So fire is impermanence and the difference between fire and fuel is one of time and characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) and one is the cause of another. Further fuel is constituted of three great elements (*Mahābhūtas*) while fire is the fourth (*tejas*) only. That means fire is different from fuel.

The Vātsīputrīya answered that fire and fuel are co-existent and the latter is in fact a complement of the former and that one is not wholly different from the other for fuel is not totally devoid of the element of fire. Similarly, the Pudgala should be distinguished from the skandhas.

Vasubandhu argues that a burning log of wood represents both fire and fuel and hence identical.

The Vātsīputrīya held that the Pudgala is neither to be described as anitya, which is subdivided into past, present and future, nor nitya (eternal). It is indeterminable and inexplicable. It is not among the constituents of a being but is perceived only when all the constituents are present.

The next question is whether the Pudgala can be cognized by any sense organs (indriya), if so by which? According to the Vasīputrīya, it is cognized by the six sense organs. Vasubandhu points out that none of the five sense organs can function independent of the mind. In fact, all the sense organs suggest to the mind indirectly that there is a Pudgala.

According to Vasubandhu if rūpa is the cause of Pudgala cognition, then one should not say that rūpa and Pudgala are different; and if cognition of rūpa leads to the cognition of the Pudgala, then rūpa and Pudgala are identical. The Vātsīputrīya neither regards the perception of rūpa as identical with the perception of Pudgala nor look upon them as different.

The next argument of the Vātsīputrīya is that if the Pudgala does not exist, who fares through saṃsāra? If only the elements exist, how to explain the statement of the Buddha, “I” of the past identified with the “I” of the present; does it indicate that the past are the elements of the present? Vasubandhu seeks to refute it by saying that just as fire passes from wood to wood, the fire never remaining the same, so the elements pass from one existence to another, nothing remaining identical.

The Vātsīputrīya ask, “who is it that remembers?” Vasubandhu replied that it is saṃjñā (perception or cognition) that remembers as remembrance is a state of consciousness directed to the same object, conditioned as it is by the previous state. The citta and caitasika dharma-s perish at every moment; in that case what is that which retains experience. Further the fact that a person acts or thinks as one and not as many separate things, that in many passages Buddha does actually use the word ‘so’, attā and pudgala and that a person’s attainment like Srotāpannahood continues to be the same in different birth, that one speaks of his past birth and so forth. All these lead us to the conclusion that beside the five skandhas, there exists some mental property to maintain the continuity of karma.

The Sarvāstivādins observe that even if the Pudgala exists, it does not help in the search for salvation, does not promote religious life and does not produce enlightenment or nirvāṇa. There is no use of the Pudgala and therefore he does not exist. So we can see, the Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya arguments and counter arguments are marked by a scholastic approach on the issues. We also see the versatile genius of Vasubandhu throughout the criticism lashed out at the Vātsīputrīya who came to uphold the existence of Pudgala to explain the ‘I-ness’ to maintain the continuity of one existence to another. But the Vātsīputrīya evidently felt that such a view did justice to our actual experience of personal existence of karma, rebirth and final liberation.

The authority of Theravāda says, although pudgala does not exist, dharma exists in a real ultimate sense. This is a new movement. Up to that time, dharma was never described like this. Dharmas are described as *saccikaṭṭha* (paramartha). Now, there is another problem, when dharmas are described as *saccikaṭṭha* paramartha, does it mean that dharmas are real entity, which exist by themselves or by their own power? Are dharmas ultimate realities, independent? Why are they called paramartha? In which sense are dharmas as ultimate? Because beyond dharmas there is no reality, this is the idea. This is rejection of noumena. Most scholars are mistaken: paramartha does not mean “absolute”. When dharmas are described as paramartha, it means dharmas represent the ultimate limits of analysis. When the world experience is analyzed, what are ultimate limits of analyses? It is dharma; beyond dharma, a dharma cannot be further reduced. The dharmas do not represent the second reality in the sense that behind dharma there is not reality. In that sense, they are ultimate; they are called paramartha.

The existence of dharma is not denied, what is denied is the permanent existence. There is no ultimate reality, no creator God, only experience. Buddhism rejects absolute. Dharmas do not mean the absolute entity. When dharmas are described as paramartha, this means dharma represents the ultimate of our existence. Why are they ultimate? This is because dharma cannot be further reduced into another reality. Dharmas are supposed to be paramartha; pudgala is not supposed to be paramartha. So there are two levels of reality: one is paramartha, the other is not paramartha. This is the first distinction of two levels of reality. What is a chair? A number of dharmas combine together. This is something composite. Mountain, animals, human beings are composite, because they can be analysed.

So there are two levels of reality: The first one is *paññatti* represented by composite things; the second one is paramartha, the reality represented by dharmas.

To sum up, in early Buddhism, pudgala can be analyzed into five aggregates: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *sañña*, *samkhāra* and *viññāna*. These five khandhas are not related to pudgala. If the five aggregates are related to the pudgala, the pudgala becomes possession, substance and five skhandhas become qualities. The five aggregates are related to each other. They are inter-connected on the basis of *Pratītyasamutpāda*.

Early Buddhism does not deny pudgala, but it gives it a new interpretation. The Early Buddhist view of pudgala is based on denial of a soul, existing entity. Early Buddhism denies the *ātman*, not pudgala. Individuality is not ultimate entity. It can be analyzed into five aggregates. Each of the five aggregates cannot be called substance, because they are inter-connected. There is no un-change entity within pudgala.

The Pudgalavādins is also anxious to share their conformity with the essentials of Buddhism and one such example is the doctrine of impermanence (*anitya*), a common legacy of all sects. Closely associated with impermanence is the Buddhist rejection of the two extreme view, viz., eternalism and annihilationism. Buddha rejected these two theories. The Theravādins and Pudgalavādins alike subscribes to their disposition of the Buddha's thought. The Pudgalavādins made their stand clear that they would not put the pudgala either in the category of conditioned or unconditioned but would call it indefinable in every aspect.

They also preserve the essence of no self (anatta) doctrine, apart from their assertion that the pudgala exists. They were careful to define the relation of the pudgala to the aggregates in such a way that the erroneous view of the self was put aside, thus they preserve the essence of the Buddha's teaching of anatta.

What leads to the assertion of the pudgala? It is the necessity to explain the continuity of the individual. When the existence comes to be reduced to dharma and each dharma has only one moment of existence. The problem is on explaining uninterrupted continuity because Pudgalavāda admitted that besides the changing dharmas there is a person, pudgala, which is a constant factor. So the same problem arises in Sarvātivāda - the theory of tri-temporal existence. The controversy between Sarvātivāda and Pudgalavāda appears during the time of Emperor Aśoka.

Some Buddhists maintain that if we explain the person with a separate series of momentary dharmas, we cannot explain certain Buddhist doctrines, which involves past and future phenomena. Taking rebirth for example, rebirth is the problem of cause and effect. The past kamma has its effect either in the present life or the future life. That shows that, in a certain subtle sense, dharmas exist in three phases of time.

Another example is memory; the phenomena of memory involve the past. When you remember things, the psychological process involves the past phenomena. So memory shows the past karma exists in a certain form.

Another instance is self-observation. When you observe the mind with our mind, what happens? This is the problem. According to Buddhist psychology, two unites of consciousness cannot arise together. At the same one moment, there cannot be two arising of consciousness. There cannot be two citta's (consciousness) at the one same time. One citta perish before other citta appears. The present citta must disappear before the successive citta arises. Anatare means immediate successor, continuity immediate sequence. When we observe our mind with our own mind, the present mind cannot observe present mind. The present mind can only observe past mind. If the past mind become some objects of consciousness, which implies that the past exists in some form. Above instances show that past and present exist in some subtle form.

Abhidhamma does not accept that there is independent existing absolute time. Past means the past dhamma; present means present dhamma; future means future dhamma. Independent dhammas have no time.

So they maintain that in order to explain these doctrines necessary they accept dharmas exist in all three phases of time: everything (dharmas) exist in all three periods of time. This is second controversy, which is also recorded in Kathāvatthu.

Those Sthaviravādins who accept this proposition – that dhammas exist in all three phases of time, secede from Theravāda and establish their separate Nikāya - Sarvāstivāda Nikāya.

Does everything exist in all three phases of time? Ekamsavāda gives absolute answer "yes" without qualification. According to Sarvāstivāda, dhamma as metaphysical aspect, preserve in all three divisions of time. Svabhāva of dharma exists in all three divisions of time. But from the empirical aspect it exists only in the

present. Each dharma has two aspects. The dhamma nature (svahāva) is non-changing, substantial, and permanent.

After the emergence of Sarvāstivāda some of Sarvāstivādins thought that it was not correct to insist that dharmas exist in all three phases of time. They had qualification for this. They insist that some past dharmas exist; some future dharmas exist. Past dharmas exist like past karma; although they are past they exist now.

Kāśyapa, the leader of a new movement seceded from Sarvāstivāda. The followers of Kāśyapa who supported this movement established a new Nikaya - Kāśyapiyas.

A controversy arises between the two schools: Sarvāstivāda and Kāśyapiyas. Pudgalavāda led by Vatsīputta is called Vātsīputiyas, similarly this new movement was led by Kāśyapa, so they are called Kāśyapiyas. They are not real Sarvāstivādas, but qualified Sarvāstivādas.

Does dhamma exist all the time? Ekamsavāda gives absolute answer. Kāśyapiyas gives qualified answer. In Buddhist schools, Vibhajjavāda as against Ekamsavāda gives a qualified answer. Therefore Kāśyapiyas constituted another section of the Vibhajjavādins and belong at about the same time as the Dharmaguptas. The inscriptions at Taksila dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. as well as others of a later date bear evidence to this fact. It is clearly stated in Abhidhamma-kośa that Vibhajjavāda means Kāśyapiyas, because Kāśyapiyas give a qualified answer to the controversial issue. This controversial issue of Sarvāstivāda dominated over all Buddhist schools after the emergence of Mahayana.

Why did the Kāśyapiyas come to be known as Vibhajjavādins? It is because they gave qualified answer. The authority of Theravāda rejects Sarvāstivāda.

Now, there are four schools:

Authority of Theravāda

Pudgalavāda (Vātsīputrīya)

Sarvāstivāda (Ekamsavāda)

Kāśyapiyas (Vibhajjavāda)

What is the authority of Theravāda standpoint? The past does not exist, which means the past dharmas do not exist and it cannot be present. The future does not exist, which means the future dharmas do not exist. On the other hand, the present exists, which means the present dharmas exist. Dharmas only exist in present phase of time. It is also the Vibhajjavāda answer. Kāśyapiyas and Theravāda, both of them give the qualified answer. So both of them are called Vibhajjavāda.

In Mahāvamsa, a king asks each Buddhist monk: *kimvāda' sammā samm Buddha?* Of what way was the Buddha enlightened one? The last monk answers: *vibhajjavādi sammā samm Buddha*. According to Mahāvamsa, Buddha prefers Vibhajjavādins. In Dipavamsa, there is no mention of the Vibhajjavādins. The Third Council refers to only Theravāda source.

According to the Chinese monk Hsuan Tsang, who traveled to India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. the Saṃmitīya was at that time the largest of the early Buddhist schools as they represented about a quarter of the entire Buddhist monastic population of India. The Vātsīputrīya and a branch of the Saṃmitīya survived in India at least until the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. but it never spread beyond the Indian subcontinent when Buddhism disappeared in India. Hsuan Tsang carried away fifteen treatises of this sect to China. There are few Pudgalavadin's texts that have survived and those in Chinese translation are of poor quality.